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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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MEXICAN SOUVENIR

Meat??? Tourists and visitors to Mexico have been returning to the U.S. with a souvenir not usually thought of as such . . . meat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently issued guidelines for consumers who are going into Mexico to buy meat for personal use. The Federal Meat Inspection Act prohibits entry of foreign meat in excess of 50 pounds per person unless certified for export by the foreign country and inspected by a U.S. meat inspector. Any excess of the 50 pounds may have to be seized and destroyed at the border stations, causing a loss to consumers. In addition to the restrictions on meat, animal health regulations currently prohibit the importation of any fresh pork, poultry, and eggs from Mexico. Pork and live hogs carry the possibility of hog cholera--a highly infectious swine disease; poultry and eggs may carry exotic Newcastle disease, deadly to poultry and other birds.

FLAME RETARDANT SLEEPWEAR

Take Care. Federal law requires that all sleepwear manufactured after July 29 in infant sizes through 6X must meet Federal standards for flame resistance. All sleepwear in those sizes manufactured in the preceding year had to be flame retardant or be labeled to show that they were not. Legislation is pending to extend this coverage for children 7 to 14 so many manufacturers are making pajamas and gowns in the larger sizes to meet the Federal flammability tests. Scientists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service have developed several flame retardant treatments for cottons that meet Federal standards. These treatments also eliminate consumer objections to earlier chemical treatments--rough fabric and unpleasant odor. However, cotton garments can lose their flame retardancy when laundered at home with detergents. This is especially true in areas with moderately hard or hard water where chemicals in the water build up deposits on the fibers. The USDA scientists say that there is a simple way to protect the flame retardant finish: Rinse the cottons in a mild acid solution during laundering. This is easily done by adding about one cup of white vinegar to the rinse cycle of home washing machines. Commercial laundries usually use a mild acid rinse as part of their standard laundering procedures.



FALL FOOD PREVIEW

You'll find fall shopping trips easier than they were last spring or summer. You may see a lot more of several key foods: beef, chicken, potatoes, and onions. Lower farm prices for these items are already in evidence. Moreover, it's the peak supply season for turkeys, cranberries, nuts, grapes, and other harvest favorites.

Here's a preview of likely developments in each department of your grocery store this fall:

There's more beef to buy now. At the same time, pork supplies will grow seasonally larger. Our meat availability may rise again next year, judging by the very large number of cattle that producers will have on hand then.

Chicken prices will go down. When consumers balked at the high chicken prices in late summer, prices started down. Now producers are gearing up to produce more broilers this fall.

Most turkeys come to market during these holiday months, so your store will have plenty on hand. But they'll cost much more than in past years; smaller supplies of competing foods have pushed up demand for turkey.

Egg producers are expanding production, after cutting back during the price freeze. The recovery will take time, so don't be surprised if eggs stay high priced through the end of 1973. Then look for more eggs and lower prices early next year.

At the dairy counter, supplies are tightening and prices rising compared with summer. While meat prices rose this spring and summer, dairy counter prices moved up slowly...even though consumers were flocking to cheeses and other dairy products for economical protein. Back on the farm, though, high feed costs were forcing dairymen to produce less and less milk. Now retail prices are going up, most sharply for butter, but also for fresh milk, cheeses, and other products. But, you can still count on dairy products as a good buy in nutrition.

Dry beans are also good protein sources for the money. Dried beans are only a few cents higher than last fall (averaging 29 cents a pound this August). Pintos are right for Mexican refried beans and chili, and kidney beans and Great Northerns make great cold bean salads, and navy beans are the foundation of New England's baked beans.

Canned tuna fish and sardines are good buys, costing little more than last year. Frozen fish, like meats, cost more than last fall. Frozen fillets are in better supply than fish sticks and other portion products.

Moving from main dishes to complementary fruits and vegetables, you'll find more fresh fruit on the produce counter than you did last fall. Good weather in parts of the West has made all the difference.

Apples, especially Delicious, are in good supply. Grapes are back this year, and in season through Thanksgiving. Another avalanche of crimson cranberries will brighten the season, and pears are at their best. Bananas, a leading fresh fruit, are priced close to last year.

Holiday baking will be pleasanter with a much better availability of raisins, dried fruit, and nuts...led by more pecans.

Citrus bobs back after Halloween, with the first oranges from the new crop. In recent years, expanding groves have yielded an ever-increasing supply. Oranges cost more this summer, but grapefruit didn't. There's a sea of orange juice, too, both in fresh chilled and frozen concentrate form. Prices haven't gone up, either.

Check berries while you're in the frozen fruit department. Bigger crops of strawberries and blueberries were frozen this summer.

Stew stuff is featured among the vegetables. Potato prices are down now, following high prices earlier in the year. And potatoes will continue cheaper through fall and winter.

It's a similar story for the onion. With a generous crop to store through winter, we won't run out again next spring. Prices should be returning to more familiar levels.

At the bakery shelves, prices of bread, cookies, and cracker meal are up from last fall, but by relatively less than prices of flour and rice. That's because baked goods include many costs besides those of grain.

Have you been stocking up? Food processors note very heavy sales of canned and frozen vegetables this year, heading for tight supplies and higher prices.

Now let's look ahead to see what all these developments will do to your shopping bill. Seasonally lower prices for red meat, chicken, and produce may hold grocery bills near their summer levels, maybe even push them down a bit.

As for more food, U.S. farmers are harvesting the biggest crops ever this fall. Also, our supplies of beef and poultry are on the uptrend. Thus, a net improvement in food supplies is possible during 1974, the only real key to better eating at better prices.

A TWIST ON PLANTING TREES

Pine In A Pot. The ancient Oriental art of bonsai culture--growing miniature trees in pots--is becoming increasingly popular in this country. With bonsai, it is possible to have a tree on your apartment balcony, but you will never sit in its shade. The aim of bonsai culture is to develop a tiny tree that has all the elements--and illusion--of a large tree growing in a natural setting. According to a new U.S. Department of Agriculture publication, "Growing Bonsai," it is possible to create a presentable bonsai in just a few seasons. The booklet describes the five basic styles of these lovely and exotic trees; lists trees, shrubs, and other woody plants suitable for bonsai culture; and gives tips on how to obtain plants. Detailed instructions on seasonal care, kinds of containers to use, and how to shape the plants through branch and root pruning are included. One section suggests ways to display your bonsai indoors and outside. "Growing Bonsai" (G-206) is available for 30 cents a copy from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

A NATURAL CHRISTMAS

From All Outdoors. Tall oaks are not the only contributions of tiny acorns. The little nuts can be turned into unique and lovely Christmas decorations. Making Christmas decorations from acorns and other plant materials--seed pods, pine cones, dried plants--found in field and wood can be fun, satisfy your creative instinct, and provide you with festive and unusual decorations. Tips on making decorations such as wreaths, pine cone trees, and table centerpieces, are given in a little fact sheet from USDA. The publication, which has been one of the most popular offered in SERVICE, has been reprinted with an added attraction . . . a section on living Christmas trees. This new section gives instructions on how to decorate a living Christmas tree, how to care for the tree before and after planting, and some tips on where to plant the tree for beauty all year. For a free copy of the fact sheet write to SERVICE, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN ASKING . . .

What's Happening To Food Prices? A new slide presentation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture asks -- and supplies some answers to -- the same question. The slide set, also available as a filmstrip, explains in layman's terms factors in the economic system that caused the rise in food prices over the past two years. It compares today's food prices with those over the past 20 years, with increases in costs of other goods and services over the same period, and with prices in other countries. The presentation also tells what is being done to increase supplies and how long it will take. The 153-frame color slide set is available for \$35 from Photography Division, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The filmstrip is \$15 from Photo Lab, Inc., 3825 Georgia Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20011. Prices include narrative guide, cassette with sound track for automatic or manual slide changing, and copies of a companion publication giving more detail.

NOT COFFEE, TEA, OR MILK

But Milk Or Milk Or Milk. Participants in child nutrition programs now have a choice of the type of milk they drink in schools. Under regulations announced by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, children may now be offered lowfat milk, skim milk, cultured buttermilk, or whole milk. Any of these can be flavored or unflavored. Previously, only fluid whole milk was allowed. All types of milk served, of course, must meet state and local standards. The change will allow flexibility in menu planning and will encourage student participation in feeding programs. The regulations apply to the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Special Milk, and Special Food Service Programs.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Lillie Vincent, Editor of SERVICE, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Telephone (202) 447-5437.
